V

THE ARTIST

THERE is, however, another side, more delicate but equally unmistakable, the artist side, by overlooking which we miss much that has made Shakespeare's plays what they are, which separates them from most of the plays written by his contemporaries and immediate followers, which tempers theatricality not only with valiant poetry (like Chapman's), exquisite poetry (like Fletcher's and like Jonson's when Jonson was in his lyric mood), but also with a dramatic tact which puts them in a class by themselves. Sometimes a simple realism as affecting as Thomas Heywood's (and mingled with much more poetic imagination than Heywood possessed), sometimes with penetrating flashes of character insight, in which perhaps only John Webster approached him, but which in Webster's meagre, surviving work are few compared with the prodigality of such flashes in Shakespeare's voluminous work.

There is, for instance, an instinctive realism amid his romantic rapture. Professor Schelling exaggerates nothing when he says: "That Shakespeare should have been the most successful writer of chronicle plays was in the nature of things, because he was the truest realist of his age."[1]

Space is lacking to dwell upon the realism and (with some lapses) the consistency of the character drawing in the historical plays. Recently a specialist in English History

[1] *Elizabethan Drama*, by Felix E. Schelling, London, Dent; New York, E. P. Dutton, 1914, vol. I, p. 307.

glowed when the conversation turned to *Richard the Second,* and he said: "None of the latest and most scientific research has broken or can break the fidelity to the main truth of Richard's character as revealed by Shakespeare." If *Richard the Third* is a libel on Richard's character, as some modern historians say, it is only fair to remember that Shakespeare painted Richard no blacker than he appeared in the pages of Holinshed and More from which Shakespeare took his material. Even when Shakespeare deliberately violates history to secure dramatic effect, as in the alteration of Hotspur's age, he keeps realistic faith with his dramatic conception.

The actual Hotspur was considerably older at the battle of Shrewsbury than Shakespeare represents him. But Shakespeare's Hotspur is very nearly if not quite consistent with himself as conceived by Shakespeare for dramatic purposes: his virtues and his faults, his success and his failure, growing out of one root and stem; the gallant, fiery warrior so impassioned with personal "honor" that he has neither time nor patience to cultivate the qualities of an effective leader, a superb knight errant but a blundering commander, a dauntless fighter but a failure as diplomat and ally.

If space permitted it would be a pleasant task to enumerate the many striking figures of soldiers and statesmen in these comprehensive, historical plays, *men,* who at first reading or fiftieth reading expose the wayward fallacy of Frank Harris that Shakespeare could not draw men of action. If Shakespeare could not, who could?

Professor Schelling says that in the historical plays Shakespeare gave such "reflections of contemporary life and manners" (meaning contemporary with Shakespeare's own life) as to make the historical plays "a veritable mirror of life."[1]

[1] *Elizabethan Drama,* introduction, p. xxix.

The tavern and inn stables become as pungent and "atmospheric" in *King Henry the Fourth* as they are in the pages of Dickens; and Fielding could not make a country squire and his premises more real than Shakespeare has made them in the scenes in Gloucestershire on Justice Shallow's estate in *Second Henry the Fourth.*

Only master genius could paint such big panoramas with so many little details of convincing reality.

Of scores of little "touches" consider one of the least significant, the delightful, little, fourth scene of the third act of *Henry the Fifth,* an interlude amid scenes of broil and battle, wherein the Princess Katharine is taking a lesson in English from her maid Alice (and, by the way, what about the comparative intelligence of Elizabethan and modern audiences? How large a portion of popular English or American audience today would sit through a dialogue in French?). Alice's English is sparse, but more than her mistress's, and Alice is a good teacher, up to her ability, for she has the Princess reiterate the few English words which she is learning in this primary lesson. When the Princess asks Alice for the English equivalent of "les doigts," Alice scratches her head (or whatever is the feminine substitute for the masculine gesture of puzzlement) and says: "Les doigts? ma foi, j'oublie les doigts; mais je me souviendrai. Les doigts? je pense qu'ils sont appelés de fingres; oui, de fingres."

Could dialogue go beyond that for sheer naturalness? Alice has forgotten the word "fingers," but after hesitation recalls it. A perfect little "natural" touch. And the sureness of Shakespeare's art is in the fact that the little device for laughter is not repeated. Being a trickster, he might, one would think, repeat the "catch." But he does not. He is artist as well as showman in this scene. Alice remembers the

other English words for which the Princess asks. Adroitly Shakespeare varies Katharine's mistakes in trying to remember "elbow." Once it is "bilbow," then it is "ilbow," as the Princess repeats her lesson. And then the little touch of flattery from Alice when she tells her mistress: "Vous prononcez les mots aussi droit que les natifs d'Angleterre." Katharine cannot quite accept the compliment at face value, but she hopes "by God's grace" ("par la grace de Dieu") that she may in a little while learn English—as many another student of a foreign language has hoped to overcome difficulties, "by God's grace."

When the Princess with her little English is wooed by bluff King Harry with his less French[1] there is a scene of high comedy worthy of the author of the greatest low comedy that was ever written, the Falstaff scenes. Having vainly tried to understand Katharine's French, the royal martial wooer asks: "But, Kate, dost thou understand thus much English, canst thou love me?" Either because the Princess has had more lessons from Alice in the interim or because Harry's question is universally understood by women, Katharine replies: "I cannot tell," and the hero of Agincourt comes back with a question as characteristic, as direct, bluff and humorous, as anything he ever said when he was the madcap companion of Falstaff: "Can any of your neighbors tell, Kate?"

In alternate use of romantic improbability and realistic verisimilitude, Shakespeare proceeded on the principle of the modern "free elective system," and followed his momentary inclination. Two instances in *Hamlet* must stand for many that might be cited by way of illustration. In the first act Horatio has come from the university to attend the funeral of the elder King Hamlet and condole with his uni-

[1] Act V, sc. 2.

versity friend, young Prince Hamlet, but he goes out on the battlements with the soldiers to watch for the ghost before making known to his friend his presence at Elsinore. It would have been easy to explain this unlikelihood: Horatio might have arrived at night and refrained from disturbing the Prince; or finding that he is too late for the funeral and hearing of the shocking speed with which the royal widow, Hamlet's mother, has remarried, he might have hesitated from embarrassment to intrude upon his friend's sorrow and chagrin—such conduct would have been in keeping with the character and general deportment of Horatio. But Shakespeare makes no explanation. What Ibsen would have had to explain on a realistic stage Shakespeare leaves without explication on a romantic stage.

On the other hand, there is a bit of nice realism in the second scene of the fifth act. Hamlet is telling Horatio how he forged a letter purporting to be from the King of Denmark to the King of England authorizing the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and when Horatio asks him how he made such a serious document appear official, Hamlet replies that he happened to have with him the signet ring of his father, the former King, which ring "was the model of that Danish seal," and with that stamped the commission. Presidents of the United States sometimes wear rings or scarf pins which are miniatures of the official seal—a "modern instance" in illustration of the plausibility of Shakespeare's device.

Speaking of rings, which, next to letters, are the most employed material objects on which Shakespeare hinges his dramatic incident, there is the dexterous episode in *Twelfth Night*[1] of the ring sent by the infatuated Olivia as a token of love to Viola disguised as a boy, sent by the fatuous

[1] Act. II, sc. 2.

Malvolio who with pompous amplifications transmits the message of his mistress. Viola is bewildered a moment, then, with woman's intuition, senses the situation: Olivia has fallen in love with her, thinking her a boy. Viola has no reason to like Olivia (for Viola is in love with the man who is wooing Olivia), but there is such a thing as sex loyalty, and Viola will not betray to a mere man Olivia's mistake and humiliation, and so she flashes back her splendid lie: "She took the ring of me, I'll none of it." One recalls old Doctor H. H. Furness, Nestor of Shakespearean commentators, waxing eloquent over this and saying (what is true) that none of Shakespeare's contemporaries could have done that episode.

When time and circumstance permitted, Shakespeare modulated his poetic diction and cadences to fit the characters and the situations. There are too many varieties of poetry in Shakespeare's pages to be catalogued here, but in illustration of his poetic tact (as "sure" as his dramatic tact) there may be cited poetry in the grand style as it appears in some of Othello's great, incremental speeches, massive poetry to fit a massive personality. Then there is the vaulting, impassioned poetry of many of Macbeth's speeches, where the verses boil and swirl like a whirlpool, and metaphor leaps out of metaphor, simile out of simile, until the mind is exhausted by the prodigality and is scarcely able to follow the swift changes of thought, passion and imagery—excited poetry to suit the excited mind of Macbeth, hovering on the verge of hallucination and delirium. Perhaps nowhere in English poetry is there anything to match it except in some of the lyrics and odes of Shelley.

And a third type of poetry (among many other types) is as well illustrated in *Coriolanus* as anywhere else, where the arrogance of Coriolanus is frequently tempered by Roman restraint (Shakespeare's perception of Roman

dignity was almost clairvoyant) and there results a matchless simplicity of diction and directness. This last tragedy which he wrote is one of his greatest, though too austere to be as popular as its predecessors. Shakespeare would seem to have written it more to please himself than the populace, constructed a technical masterpiece as skillful as *Othello,* and seldom lapsed into the rhodomontade, which was one of his besetting temptations. The conclusion of the second scene of the third act is poignant in its simplicity, when against his inclination Coriolanus finally yields to the persuasions of his mother (one of the greatest of Shakespeare's great women) and consents to return to the forum and placate the angry mob:

> Pray be content.
> Mother, I am going to the market-place;
> Chide me no more . . . . . .
> . . . . . Look, I am going;
> Commend me to my wife. I'll return consul.

And the great Volumnia, aware that she has won a victory over her son's will at the cost of what he and she prize most dearly, their patrician pride, says briefly: "Do your will." And the two loyal men friends urge him when in the market-place "to answer mildly;" "Well, mildly be it then. Mildly," says Coriolanus. And the scene ends.

But in the market-place he is not permitted to be mild. The wily, slimy tribunes sting him back to his old fury. If there were justice in public affairs these designing demagogues would be banished from Rome along with Coriolanus. So, prodded to a fresh outbreak of arrogance, Coriolanus vents his scorn upon the Roman populace in a rhetorical outburst which is the most famous speech in the play, but far from the most artistic, and he is banished. There follows[1] the parting at the gates of Rome of Corio-

[1] Act IV, sc. 1.

lanus with his mother, wife, and friends, a scene of restrained dignity, of sorrow too deep for agitation, of simplest and most natural language from Coriolanus. His mother has shed prudence and rails against the rabble that banished her son, but he maintains his recovered stoicism, and seeks to calm his mother, cheer his wife, and put heart into his crushed friends—a speech too long for quotation, but containing the incomparable admonition to his old general:

> Tell these sad women [his wife and mother]
> 'Tis fond [foolish] to wail inevitable strokes.

"Tell these sad women." It is like Antony after the defeat at Actium: "Call to me all my sad captains."

Which leads to citation of just a few of many memorable brevities of speech in which with equal poetic and dramatic tact Shakespeare summed up a situation or revealed a character: old Lear, his passion spent, bending over his dead daughter, whom he tries to believe not dead: "Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little." Or Hamlet, "The rest is silence." Or Cleopatra, after her rich, oriental lamentation over her dead Antony, saying simply:

> We'll bury him; and then what's brave, what's noble,
> Let's do it after the high Roman fashion.

Or Brutus facing the ghost of Caesar and hearing that on the morrow he must fight not only with the armies of the triumvirate but also with destiny itself in the image of the murdered Caesar, whose ghost has grimly told Brutus that he will see him "at Philippi," "Why, I will see thee at Philippi, then." Or Laertes, when his crazed sister has left the room: "Do you see this, O God?" Or Ulysses, after he and Troilus have been eyewitnesses to the infidelity of Cressida, turning to the stricken lad and saying with equal sympathy, simplicity and finality: "All's done, my lord." And the crushed, bewildered Troilus, struggling to disbelieve

the testimony of his own eyes and the brief assurances of Ulysses that the wanton they have just seen was really Cressida, crying out:

> Let it not be believed for womanhood!
> Think, we had mothers.

Or Desdemona, after Othello's brutal accusations of her, and his exit, making answer to her maid Emilia's excited inquiry ("How do you, madam? How do you, my good lady?") in the simple words "Faith, half asleep." Or Ophelia (when the frantic Hamlet tells her "I loved you not") "I was the more deceived." Or the old general Siward (in *Macbeth*) hearing that his son is dead and having ascertained that his wounds were "on the front," "Why, then, God's soldier be he?" Or Juliet, waking from the sleeping potion in the ghastly tomb to see Friar Laurence bending over her: "O comfortable friar!" Or broken Shylock asking permission to leave the courtroom: "I am not well." Or Richard the Second answering Northumberland's demands that he read (and presumably sign) the bill of particulars, the charges on which he is being deposed:

> Must I do so? And must I ravel out
> My weaved-up folly?

Or generous Harry of Monmouth having slain Harry Percy in combat standing over the dying Hotspur with silent commiseration and completing the sentence which death stopped in the throat of the conquered foe, Hotspur gasping:

> No Percy thou art dust
> And food for ——

and the magnanimous victor ends the sentence:

> For worms, brave Percy: fare thee well, great heart!

Not all these citations are in the same class, and some are taken out of the context, are parts of longer speeches. But

they illustrate the point, Shakespeare's skill in condensing into simplest phrases the summation of a tragic situation or a tragic conclusion. He whose facile power over language frequently led him into verbosity and bombast could, at a critical moment, be singularly brief and utterly effective.

And this leads to Shakespeare's use of silence, a topic long dear to this writer and but recently written about by Professor Alwin Thaler in his book *Shakespeare's Silences*. One of the most effective examples of silence in drama is Lady Macbeth's silence after the tumultuous banquet where the ghost of Banquo appeared before the distracted Macbeth. She has used all her force and tact to keep her distraught husband from betraying his guilt, has at last dismissed the banqueters, and she and her husband are alone. One might expect a torrent of reproach and abuse from Lady Macbeth (earlier in the play she had shown rich resourcefulness of speech in upbraiding and goading-on her hesitating husband), but now Lady Macbeth says nothing. She is exhausted by the ordeal through which she has passed as a buffer between her frantic husband and the excited guests. But there is more to it than that. What is there to say? Blood-boltered criminals that they are, what is there to say? Silence is more dramatic here than any speech, even any speech that Shakespeare, master of language, might have written.

This writer has long meditated a book on Shakespeare's minor or subordinate characters. Maybe he will write it some day. If so he will devote detailed attention to many characters who are usually abominably acted on the modern stage under the vicious "star" system, because the characters say and do so little that they are usually committed to supernumeraries, actors of too low a grade of intelligence to perceive the possibilities in these lesser rôles. Among many

of these, three must answer now for illustration: the Doctor in *Macbeth,* Claudius in *Hamlet,* and Emilia in *Othello.*

The Doctor speaks only about two hundred and forty words in the great sleep-walking scene, but he who reads often and sympathetically this scene knows this Doctor as well as he knows his own physician professionally and personally.

This Doctor is not a young man. The Waiting-Gentlewoman with whom he talks is young, with the self-complacency of youth, the smug satisfaction in her virtue that has not yet been tried in the furnace of experience. The contrast between the Waiting-Gentlewoman's cool self-felicitation that she is not in the conscience-plight of Lady Macbeth, her mistress, her canny care for "number one" (she will tell nothing to the Doctor that might get herself into trouble) are strikingly different from the Doctor's forgetfulness of self, his solicitude for his patient, his human sympathy. He who has witnessed so much misery in the pursuit of his profession has no inclination to plume himself on his personal escape from misery. At first he is all doctor, then all astonished, sympathetic, comprehending, human being, then all doctor again—and all in two hundred and forty words.

He plies the maid with questions about the symptoms of the Queen. He ponders the report which he receives from the maid, he regards the condition as serious. Then he asks for more symptoms. Has the Queen talked, and if so what did she say? The maid refuses to answer that question—she is not going to say anything that might get her into trouble. The Doctor tries to reassure her. What is said to a physician is held in sacred confidence and he tells the maid it is her duty to report the facts to him.

The brief colloquy is interrupted by the entrance of the Queen. The Doctor scrutinizes her closely, asks questions

about the light which the Queen carries, her gestures, and so forth. Then he listens intently as the somnambulistic Queen begins to talk. The Queen refers to Macduff's wife who had disappeared so strangely, to this and other things. The Doctor, with a physician's protective instinct, tells the maid she has been hearing things she should not have heard. As the Queen proceeds, the Doctor begins to understand—and, understanding, he realizes what many a physician must at times realize, that he is at the limit of his science. The Queen is sick in mind, not body: "This disease is beyond my practice," says the Doctor. He is the disarmed man of science now, just the anxious, helpless, sympathetic, human being. Then the Queen says something about Banquo and his grave. "Even so?" mutters the Doctor to himself. So *that's* what became of Banquo! As the great scene draws toward an end the Doctor realizes that if there is any hope for this woman it must be in spiritual not medical care—"More needs she the divine than the physician." Evidently she is a murderess or at least *particeps criminis,* but she is a woman, a tortured woman. And his experience has taught him pity for suffering, whatever the cause. "May God forgive her," he starts to say, but he does not say it. The best of us—what are we? "God, God forgive—*us all!*" says this human-hearted man. The moment after the Queen's departure from the room he is all physician again, giving orders to the maid. At least the Queen must be protected from committing suicide—a wise precaution in view of the event, for though Shakespeare leaves us in some doubt concerning the cause of Lady Macbeth's death (also of Ophelia's death), there is a strong presumption of suicide. Now the Doctor knows what ails his patient, but his diagnosis is futile, for he can neither cure the disease nor make known to others its cause—"I think but dare not speak."

And it is all done in two hundred and forty words. A frugal word-economist, this Shakespeare—when he chose to be.

Some years prior to the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, 1916, world preparation was afoot for a world memorialization of the event. But a world war intervened and the ceremonials were truncated. However, some universities, societies, and individuals paused in their war activities to observe the occasion, and out of the observations there came a few notable publications, for instance, the collection of Columbia University essays issued under the title *Shaksperian Studies,* and the memorable address by the all-too-reticent Professor George Lyman Kittredge, entitled *Shakspere.*[1]

Professor Kittredge dwelt at some length upon the character of King Claudius in *Hamlet,* as Professor George Saintsbury had previously done in his chapter on Shakespeare in the *Cambridge History of English Literature.* Both scholars called attention to the care with which Shakespeare had worked out this character. But before these scholar-critics had spoken, many attentive students of *Hamlet* must have been struck by the superfluous workmanship expended upon Claudius—superfluous to theatrical necessity.

For the plot, all that was necessary was to make Claudius a villain—an adulterer and murderer. Nothing else in Claudius is needed to forward the story. Claudius steals the heart and flesh of the wife of his brother, the reigning king, murders the king, usurps the throne, marries the widow, and, when he discovers that his guilt is suspected by his nephew-step-son, arranges secretly to have Hamlet killed. As pretty a piece of villainy as could have been invented by Shakespeare's melodramatic contemporary Massinger, as was ever presented on the stage of the old London theatre

[1] Harvard University Press, 1916.

in the Bowery, as can be seen today on the motion picture screen. A villain who leaves nothing to be desired either in wickedness or retribution, this Claudius.

Though a more substantial rôle than that of the Doctor in *Macbeth,* it would seem (judging from stage performances of the play) that Claudius is another character uninviting to actors of talent. He is seldom if ever adequately cast. The actors who enact him are either pallid supernumeraries or men who see only the scoundrel's outstanding qualities, nothing of Shakespeare's artistic shadings in drawing him.

These shadings are artistic, not moral. In drawing Claudius, Shakespeare shifted not an inch his strict boundary line between good and evil. Claudius is a rascal, and richly deserves the death he gets from Hamlet's sword. Shakespeare leaves us in no doubt about that. The only pity is that Hamlet did not kill him sooner. Hell was waiting for Claudius, and if Hamlet had sent him thither sooner, he would have saved the lives of seven other people, including his own and that of poor, helpless, futile Ophelia. But, of course, if Hamlet had killed Claudius sooner there would have been no play, or at least a play quite different in plot from that which is.

Yet without palliating the wickedness of Claudius, without rousing a shadow of pity for his violent execution, Shakespeare created a complex human being, not a monster. Gilbert and Sullivan in their delightful, tuneful fooling called attention to the possibility that a burglar when not a-burgling may be a rather pleasant person. Shakespeare by the cunning and the care of his art of characterization showed in Claudius what every prison warden knows, what every reader of newspapers knows, that criminals are sometimes brave men and sometimes even possess genial traits.

These facts do not alter, and should not alter, the law's

firm dealing with them. They are tried, condemned and executed, not for the latent good that is in them, but for the blatant evil which led them to endanger the security of society. The criminal code cannot be as subtle as human nature. Judicial procedure cannot be as flexible as artistic justice.

In Shakespeare's handling of rascals there is no hint of the contemporary sentimentalism which has been summed up in the phrase "To know all is to forgive all." Shakespeare forgives nothing. He merely presents the human fact. When that complex and fluent fact comes into conflict with rigid law, the logic of his plays indicates that he was on the side of the law.

But that does not alter the fact itself, or the human observations and artistic practice of Shakespeare. Human nature is a complicated piece of machinery, and even a Claudius may possess amiable qualities. As a showman Shakespeare did not have to shade his portrait with these amiabilities. But as an artist he must, for, as George Saintsbury says, speaking of this same Claudius: "At this time of his career [when he was writing his great tragedies] he simply could not 'scamp' his work in the direction of character any more than in the direction of poetry. Others might throw in 'supers' to fill up a play—he would not." And Saintsbury adds that Claudius "is a villain but he is a man."[1]

Claudius illustrates a slight error in Doctor Stoll's usually straight thinking, namely that a Shakespearean character may be judged by what other characters in the play say of him.[2] This is true with reservations. A Shakespearean character is to be understood, in part, by what he himself says

[1] *Cambridge History of English Literature* (British edition), vol. V, pp. 200, 202.

[2] Doctor Stoll emphasizes this in his essay on Shylock; but see also essay on "The Characterization," *Shakespeare Studies*, p. 140: "The comment of others is one of Shakespeare's chief means of characterization."

—and does. What Prince Hamlet and the ghost of his murdered father and the faithful Horatio say about Claudius is true and just, as far as it goes, but it does not go the full length of the personality of Claudius.

These three know Claudius better than others in the play know him, not excepting the Queen, his wife. For it is apparent that Shakespeare intended his auditors to understand that, though Queen Gertrude has been an adulteress and though she married her paramour with indecent haste after the death of her first husband, she had no suspicion that a murder had been committed until her son informed her of the fact, and even after that shocking enlightenment, she behaved as if she were not altogether sure that her distracted son knew what he was talking about. Either that, or else Shakespeare when he rewrote his play in the form in which it appeared in the second quarto, failed to make the Queen's behavior self-consistent after the stormy interview with her son in her boudoir.

What the ghost and Prince Hamlet say about the scoundrelism of Claudius is sufficiently denunciatory and tempestuous to satisfy the virtue of any audience, Elizabethan or modern, and to gratify the most whole-hearted hatred of evil and evil doers. And all they say is deserved. But what they say is a verdict, not a portrait.

The portrait is furnished by Claudius himself, in his contacts with other people, in his conversations and his meditations.

In the verdict and in the fate which justly overtakes Claudius there is the hand of Shakespeare the playwright; in the portrait there is the hand of Shakespeare the artist. The two aspects are entirely consistent with each other. But the portrait is deeper, wider, more human, more faithful to the actualities of this sad world, in short, more artistic.

In some phases of him this Claudius is "a good fellow." Many "a good fellow" has landed in jail, and some on the gallows and in the electric chair. And where they ended was their deserved destination. It is virtue, not good fellowship, which saves people from ruin.

Claudius has a genial liking for people—so long as they do not get in the way of his ambitious projects—a trait of some politicians who are innocent of the criminal tendencies of Claudius. He has a pleasant way with young people (with Laertes, for instance, in the first act of the play); kindly consideration for old people (Polonius, for instance, until Claudius grows impatient with the doddering blunders of the fatuous, old Lord Chamberlain); commiseration for suffering innocence (he is gentle with poor, crazed Ophelia and is sorrow-stricken by her condition even amid his anxiety concerning the perils that are thickening around him); a genuine affection for his wife's son (until he realizes that Hamlet knows his guilty secret, Claudius heartily desires to keep the young man at court, both for Hamlet's mother's sake and because Claudius has a personal liking for the Prince—a regard which is emphatically not reciprocated). He is devoted to the wife whom he has won by such foul means; this is evident throughout the play, and in several places made explicit, as when Claudius explains to Laertes, as one confessing a weakness, that the Queen's love for Hamlet has prevented him from dealing with a dangerous enemy as one in his authoritative position might, that it is his "virtue" or his "plague" to be so much in love with his wife that he cannot live without her, and therefore dares do nothing openly which might alienate her affections from himself; and again in the climax of that line, noted by Professor Kittredge, wherein, communing with himself, Claudius states to himself why he cannot truly repent by bringing

forth fruit meet for repentance, cannot, even to save his soul from eternal torment give up the things which his crime has won for him:

> My crown, mine own ambition and *my queen.*

He has that which Shakespeare's cooler rascals, such as Iago and Edmund, usually have, ability to assess himself without illusion; they deceive everybody except themselves —do these clear-headed scoundrels, Iago, Edmund and Claudius. Claudius has one thing which Iago and Edmund have not, a conscience, enough conscience to distinguish clearly between remorse and repentance.

That spectacle[1] of Claudius trying to pray, and unable to pray because he knows that prayer is for those who obey or are truly penitent after they have disobeyed, and because he knows that his own spiritual condition is only remorse, that spectacle is one of the many stupendous "sermons" which slipped into the lines of this play-actor who never "preached" anything deliberately, but who had a gift of "seeing true" which made him a mentor who intended only to be a caterer of amusement. It is no gowned and surpliced doctor of divinity, but the stricken, scarlet sinner Claudius who utters that truth beyond which truth cannot go:

> In the corrupted currents of this world
> Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
> *There* is no shuffling, *there* the action lies
> In his true nature.

And, finally, Claudius has a calm courage in the face of personal peril, quite consistent with criminality, as wardens and sheriffs who have chaperoned murderers to the gates of eternity can testify, and which enables Shakespeare to write a brief scene of unsurpassed, dramatic effectiveness.

[1] Hamlet, Act. III, sc. 3.

In the fifth scene of the fourth act Laertes, back post-haste from Paris, where news has reached him that his father has been murdered, bursts into the room where Claudius and the Queen are conversing, and with drawn sword hotly demands satisfaction for his father's murder. Outside there is a mob (a typical, Shakespearean, excited, fickle, dangerous mob) clamoring for vengeance and shouting "Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!" It is a ticklish moment, and a better man than Claudius might well be cowed. The calmness of Claudius is superb. The frightened Queen leaps between her husband and the vengeance-thirsty Laertes, seizes Laertes to prevent him from killing her husband. Calmly Claudius says twice, "Let him go, Gertrude," and coolly asks Laertes why his "rebellion looks so giant-like." Furious Laertes demands "Where is my father?" Laconically, Claudius answers "Dead." Again Queen Gertrude throws herself upon Laertes to stay his avenging arm, gasping, "But not by him," and again the unperturbed Claudius admonishes her to desist: "Let him demand his fill." With hot resolution and in molten speech Laertes consigns allegiance "to hell" and swears he will "be revenged most thoroughly for my father." "Who shall stay you?" the unfaltering Claudius counters. And when Laertes swears "not all the world," Claudius quietly asks him if it is necessary to kill everybody in order to satisfy his vengeance. When Laertes, calming down a little, says he desires the death of none but him or those responsible for his father's death, this unexcited Claudius, talking as an elder to a spoiled child recovering from "tantrums," says in language worthy of Shakespeare's best: "Why, now you speak like a good child."

A little later Claudius is closeted with Laertes, working out an infamous plot, spiced with lies, against the life of

Hamlet, a conspiracy destined to sweep to violent death himself, his beloved wife and Laertes, as well as Hamlet. He is a precious villain, and he "gets what's coming to him," but he is no theatrical automaton. He is a man predominantly wicked because of his ambition and his uncontrolled love for his brother's wife (Hamlet calls it "lust," but lust lacks the constancy of Claudius' infatuation for Gertrude). He is, as Saintsbury says, "a man"; as Kittredge says, "a very great man, though an enormous malefactor."

If space were unlimited, it would be pleasant to linger over Laertes as an example, and one of the best, of Shakespeare's use of the "dramatic foil," a familiar theatrical device of setting one character over in contrast against another. The melodramatist, working only in primary colors or chiaroscuro, usually sets a villain against a paragon to make his paragon whiter. Shakespeare the artist works in "values." Laertes is quite definitely and consciously a parallelism to Hamlet. Each young man has a murdered father to avenge: says the just Hamlet of Laertes, "by the image of my cause, I see the portraiture of his," and, later, when they are about to begin the fatal fencing bout, Hamlet says, with an overtone of ironical significance, a pun with meat in it, "I'll be your foil, Laertes." The contrast and comparison is subtle and "valued." Laertes has all the resolution and quick decision which Hamlet lacks. As a man of action, he is immensely superior to Hamlet. But in intellect and in all the qualities we call "spiritual" Hamlet is, correspondingly, the superior of Laertes. The comparison and contrast are theatrical in purpose, artistic in effect.

Just one other minor character of so many (a book is needed to deal with them) must be suggested rather than analyzed, Emilia in *Othello*.

Perhaps there should be a distinction between minor

characters whose lines are few (like those of the Doctor in *Macbeth,* old Erpingham in *Henry the Fifth,* Sebastian in *The Tempest,* and so forth) and subsidiary characters whose lines are rather numerous, like Claudius and Emilia.

Be that as it may, Emilia is a striking example of the way Shakespeare combined showmanship and art. Her stealing of Desdemona's handkerchief to gratify an unexplained whim of her husband's (Iago) is theatrical claptrap, unadulterated "hokum," a bit of creaking machinery to get the plot wound up. That disposed of, Emilia becomes a person as real as any in literature, completely digested by the author's imagination and projected into the development of the play's fatality with the sure hand of an artist. If a little higher in the social scale than a servant, she is, in any event, servant-minded. She is an army girl (like Mulvaney's wife). She has knocked about military camps as the wife of a subordinate officer too long and she has seen too much to carry very heavy impedimenta of "ideals." So far as ideals are concerned, Emilia "travels light."

Her blunt language to her husband[1] carries conviction, and makes it evident that Shakespeare meant to exonerate her from Iago's pretended suspicion of her marital infidelity as a *fait accompli,* but she frankly admits, in conversation with her mistress, that she could not swear to keep her virtue in all possible contingencies. Resistance to temptation might conceivably have its limits. "The world's a huge thing" she answers when Desdemona asks her if she would yield her virtue "for all the world."[2] Rather coarse-grained is Emilia, her speech as frank as her nature. The word that Desdemona's tongue falters on comes from Emilia's lips without hesitation or embarrassment. She has no illusions about the

[1] *Othello,* Act IV, sc. 2, lines 144–147.

[2] Ibid., Act IV, sc. 3, lines 68–69.

difference in attitude between wooers and husbands[1]—in fact, she has no illusions about men at all.

When poor bewildered Desdemona finding that her idol has feet of clay, but, still not understanding what Othello's transformation is all about, utters that exquisite line of uncomprehending resignation, "Nay, we must think men are not gods," Emilia, in her forthright way goes straight to the point, a surmise that Othello's affliction may be jealousy, and if it is that, the situation is bad, for jealous men

> Are not ever jealous for the cause,
> But jealous for they're jealous.

When Desdemona prays "Heaven" to keep this thing "from Othello's mind," Emilia, apparently without much faith or conviction, says, "Lady, amen."[2]

Emilia has been Iago's wife too long to dwell on mountain tops of spiritual exaltation. A plain woman who deals with facts, not roseate dreams. It is a pity that Shakespeare had to mar the portrait with Emilia's participation in the handkerchief episode and her incredible stupidity, if not duplicity, when Othello in Emilia's presence demands of Desdemona an explanation of the disappearance of the handkerchief.[3] That is the theatrical jugglery of the plot.

For the rest, Emilia is sound and true. She has no ideals but she has what honest matter-of-fact women so often have—the thing that makes them so dangerous to tricksters —an everyday, militant passion for justice.

That devotion to justice wrecks all Iago's scheme. He who knows so much has never known about that. Maybe Emilia herself never knew about it until she was roused by a dreadful act of injustice. Some people don't know how good they are until a crisis stirs their goodness into action.

[1] *Othello,* Act III, sc. 4, lines 100–103.
[2] Ibid., lines 159–164.
[3] Ibid., lines 55–96.

Iago, who works his will so easily upon others, never takes his wife into the reckoning. A word from him and she will be silent. But that is where Iago miscalculates. "There is a crack in everything God has made," says Emerson. Emilia's passion for justice is the crack in the scheme of things presented in *Othello,* and the crack, under the earthquake shock of ruthless murder, widens into a chasm which swallows up Iago—also Emilia herself and Othello. For, changing the metaphor, it is the cancerous proliferation of evil and its consequences which makes the Shakespearean tragedies so impressive—and so "true."

When Emilia, after much beating on the door of the chamber in which Othello has just strangled his wife,[1] is admitted and excitedly tells Othello that Roderigo has been killed by Cassio, she hears a stifled moan from the bed, tears aside the curtains and beholds her mistress dying, murdered. The dialogue which follows is too excellent to be paraphrased. In the words of John Keats about a less exalted piece of literature:

> Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,
> For here, in truth, it doth not well belong
> To speak.

Ibsen has not surpassed it in realism and not often has Shakespeare surpassed it in poetry.

When, at last, it has penetrated Emilia's mind that her husband has instigated this murder with a false story about the stolen handkerchief, she, defying alike Othello's threats ("I care not for thy sword") and the command of Iago to hold her tongue and go home ("Perchance, Iago, I shall ne'er go home"), blurts out the story of the handkerchief as it really was, receives her death wound from Iago's sword, creeps up on the bed beside her dead mistress, and sobs out her life.

[1] *Othello,* Act V, sc. 2.

Of all things, Emilia has become a heroine and a martyr. And yet there is nothing inconsistent with her character in this. When these Emilias make up their minds that justice shall be done, justice generally is done. And justice overtakes alike the defiant remorseless Iago and the wan repentant Othello, who has discovered when it is too late how he has been duped.

Emilia is the Nemesis of this play as Macduff is the Nemesis of *Macbeth.*

In dramaturgy Shakespeare has scarcely surpassed the manipulation of Macduff, as he took the story over from Holinshed's rambling chronicle. Macduff illustrates Shakespeare's skill, not only in drawing secondary characters but also in weaving them into his story with dramatic power. Holinshed does not introduce Macduff until the narrative is about two-thirds ended, and then only casually. But Shakespeare, with true eye for a dramatic stroke, brings him forward into the play, arranges for his entrance just after the murder of Duncan,[1] an integral part of the structure of the play, an instrument of Nemesis.

And what an entrance it is! Is there a more stunning stage entrance in dramatic literature? In a chamber to the left is the King of Scotland murdered, in a chamber to the right the guiltiest couple in all the kingdom are frantically attempting to cover up traces of their crime, in the middle distance is a porter babbling drunken nonsense overladen with unconscious irony; with memories of the old morality plays he imagines himself keeper of hell-gate and in stern reality he is just that, keeper of the gate of that hell which mortals prepare by their violation of the plain laws of human obligations. And on the outer gate God's messenger of

[1] *Macbeth,* Act II, sc. 3.

vengeance, in person of Macduff, is thundering for admission, his mailed fist clanging on the brazen gate.

DeQuincey has meditated memorably on this scene:[1] "From my boyish days I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in *Macbeth*. It was this: the knocking at the gate which succeeds to the murder of Duncan produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity. . . . At length I solved it to my own satisfaction. . . . When the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them."

However, one needed not to have read DeQuincey to get the effect when he saw the scene performed by Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett—the shock and suspense of the clamorous and insistent beating on the gate without, the entrance of Barrett as Macduff with virile step and head erect demanding of the porter in clear crisp tones:

> Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,
> That you do lie so late?

The normal world of health had broken in on the sick world of horror within the castle, and, moreover, one knew that the entrance of Macduff was the first casting of a

[1] "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth," originally published, October, 1823, in *London Magazine;* in DeQuincey's *Collected Writings,* edited by David Masson, London, A. & C. Black, vol. X.

shadow across Macbeth's path, a forelengthened shadow of a far-off but inexorable event.

Structural dramatic art can go no further than that timed arrival and great entrance scene.

Of the ethics of it one must not speak, lest he be betrayed into doing what Shakespeare refrained from doing—preaching.

The word "psychology" has been used several times in these lectures. It is an inhibited word in some of the most intelligent recent Shakespearean criticism. The reason for the inhibition is valid: in the name of "psychology" and "philosophy" many strange and esoteric meanings have been read into the Shakespearean dramas; the revulsion to "external" criticism is healthy. But as has been remarked before in these pages, there is so much in the Shakespearean drama which resembles psychology that it might just as well be called psychology.

With one example out of scores, illustrating a double impression from some of Shakespeare's lines, a theatrical obvious meaning and a subtle under-significance, this bit of writing on Shakespeare as showman and artist must conclude.

In the sixth scene of the fourth act of *King Lear* the old King is a raving maniac, and that is the showman's impression which Shakespeare wished to convey to his audience. But Shakespeare the psychologist and artist makes Lear's raving psychological, a faithful presentation of monomania and hysteria.

The stage direction (not necessarily written by Shakespeare) reads: "Enter Lear fantastically dressed with wild flowers," and sometimes the actor represents Lear wearing a chaplet of wild flowers but the lines themselves quite clearly inform us that Lear wore a felt hat (perhaps an old felt

hat with wild flowers intertwined in the ribbon). Seasoned Shakespearean actors have remarked that no stage directions are necessary in Shakespeare, that the lines themselves tell the actor what to do—in this instance what to wear.

The crazed Lear, talking with Gloucester and Edgar says: "I will preach to thee: mark."

The theme of his sermon is the vanity of life, its misery which begins with birth and ends not until death. With the old instinct of reverence he removes his hat, as he had been accustomed to remove it in listening to sermons in the royal chapel. And then he begins his discourse:

> When we are born, we cry that we are come
> To this great stage of fools.

But his unstabilized mind cannot hold the thread of his thought. He hesitates, falters, stops, and his wandering eyes fall upon the felt hat which he is holding in his hand; "this is a good block," he murmurs (hatters still speak of the "block" of a hat). He fumbles the hat, so soft, so silent. It suggests his monomania, revenge upon his false daughters and their husbands. Suppose cavalry horses were shod with felt; their steps would not be heard and an enemy's stronghold could be surprised:

> If were a delicate stratagem, to shoe
> A troop of horse with felt.

The thought fascinates him. He will put the idea and the resolution into practice:

> I'll put 't in proof;
> And when I have stol'n upon these sons-in-law

—but the excitement of the idea is too much for the old crazed king and he falls into hysterical cries, shrieking the word "kill" six times:

> Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

The subtlety of the perturbed mental processes probably did not "get over" to the audience. The audience heard what they craved, the ravings of a madman. But Shakespeare could produce this sensational effect and at the same time satisfy himself as artist and psychologist by giving to Lear's ravings the coherent incoherence of a victim of monomania and hysteria.

Only a few instances in this chapter of the way Shakespeare the artist shaded the exhibitions of Shakespeare the showman. None of his contemporaries did these things with so much cunning, perhaps no other subsequent dramatist until Ibsen.

Shakespeare commentary will never go straight if it overlooks the necessity under which the practised showman worked under the stage conditions of his day. Neither will it go straight if it overlooks the artistic nuances. The middle ground is the only solid ground, recognition of the blending, sometimes conflicting, motives of showman and artist in the dramatic work of William Shakespeare.

He was a romanticist with strong traits of realism, a showman with compelling impulses of an artist. His work is thus a medley, sometimes a hodgepodge, but a hodgepodge behind which flamed the divine fires of genius, the artist's craving to do things the way they should be done.

STOCKTON AXSON.